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Influence Of Buddhism On Gandhi's Principle Of Non-Violence

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Abstract: This study attempts to explore the Buddhist philosophy and as well as Gandhi's principle of non-violence. It aims to show how Buddhist philosophy has deeply influenced Gandhi's commitment of non-violence and his promotion of *Satya* (truth) and *Ahimsa* (non-violence). Gandhi rejected the use of force and upheld truth and peace, concepts strongly aligned with Buddhist traditions.
Index terms**:** *Satya, Ahimsa, Buddhism, Gandhi, Philosophy*

INTRODUCTION:

Buddhist philosophy, which stems from the teachings of Gautama Buddha, has long influenced humanity with its focus on non-violence, tolerance and the pursuit of enlightenment. The philosophy promotes adherence to ethical guidelines such as Four Noble Truths, the Eight Fold path, the Three Marks of Existence, and the Five precepts which guide its followers towards a life of moral order and mental clarity. Central to Buddhism are the concepts of *Karma* and *Nirvana* which offer a framework for ethical living for human beings.

Buddhist philosophy is an ancient Indian Philosophical system that grew out of the religio-philosophical traditions, teachings and beliefs of Buddhism. Buddhism is deeply connected to the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, commonly referred to as the Buddha, whose philosophy shaped an ancient system of metaphysical and ethical thought. Gandhi's own principles of *Satya* (truth) and *Ahimsa* (non-violence) were greatly shaped by Buddhist's ideals, as reflected in his personal and public life. His speeches delivered in different occasions and multiple platforms also indicate his ideals being influenced by Buddhism.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY: This study aims to examine the influence of Buddhist philosophy on Gandhi's Philosophy of non-violence and to explore the broader relationship between these two philosophies.

METHODOLOGY:

This study employs a descriptive research method, drawing upon secondary sources, including works like *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* by Basant Kumar Lal, *Gandhi and Non-violence* by William Borman and *The Light of Asia* by Sir Edwin Arnold. Gandhi's autobiography -*The Story of My Experiments with Truth* and *The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi* serves as the primary source and key reference in this study.

BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY AND GANDHI:

Buddhist philosophy, rooted in the teachings of Gautama Buddha, revolves round a systematic understanding of suffering and its causes. It is basically the philosophical system of religious beliefs and philosophical inquiry that revolves round the teaching of Gautama Buddha. It also encapsulates the ideologies that sprang up in the various schools of Buddhism. Buddhist philosophy which basically includes the Four Noble Truths: the truth of suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the path leading to the cessation. Gandhi in his introduction of his autobiography says, "What I want to achieve- what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years- is self-realisation, to see God face to face, to attain *Moksha*. I live and move and have my being in pursuit in this goal." In his search to attain *Moksha* (liberation), he naturally found himself to be inspired by the Buddha and his teachings.

For Gandhi, Buddhism was a progressive attempt to disseminate the principle or dogma of *Ahimsa* or non-violence. To him Buddhism represented a profound expression of *Ahimsa* or non-violence. His understanding of non-violence was influenced by his reading of texts like the Bhagavad Gita named as *The Song Celestial* (1885) and *The Light of Asia* (1879). In the Missionary Conference in Madras, on February 14, 1916, he made his first public speech referring it to the teachings of the Buddha. Gandhi emphasized that the Swadeshi spirit has strengthened Hinduism, making it a formidable force, and pointed out that it was a misconception to assume that Hinduism had supplanted Buddhism; instead but had absorbed and assimilated its teachings. In a speech delivered at the Conference of Humanitarian League on October 21, 1917, Gandhi said that Buddhism and Hinduism valued similar fundamental principles or beliefs (The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, 16:106). He had the opinion that it was cowardly and against the principles of Buddha to be afraid to die which was also reflected in many articles that proves his inspiration from the Buddhist philosophy.

GANDHI'S PRACTICE OF THE BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY:

In the year 1924, Gandhiji had a chance to deliver speech on May 18 on the occasion of Buddha Jayanti and as well as in Calcutta on May 7, 1925. During his speeches, he acknowledged that his knowledge of Buddhism was mostly based on reading of Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* and as well as couple of other books. He admitted to reading the book thoroughly and developing deep admiration for its contents. Gandhi expressed that some of his acquaintances believed that he was expressing in his life the teachings of the Buddha, to which he responded by stating that he did indeed strive to follow those teachings to the best of his ability (The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi; 27:448, 31:300).

In 1926, Gandhi, while delivering a series of discourses on Gita in the Sabarmati Ashram, explained that there was no difference between the *Nirvana* as emphasized in Buddhist teachings and the *Nirvana* as mentioned in the Gita. He said that both referred to the same state.

Gandhi believed that Ahimsa was central to the values of a Kshatriya. In his writings, he noted that figures such as Mahavira, Buddha, Rama, Krishna- who were Kshatriyas and votaries of *Ahimsa*, were strong proponents of non-violence and sought to spread this ideal. He described *Ahimsa* as the highest form of forgiveness, which he considered to be a virtue of the courageous. He also remarked that non-violence cannot be practical without forgiveness (The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi; 36:428-429).

In a 1928 speech on forgiveness at Sabarmati ashram, Gandhi described forgiveness as an active, positive quality rather than a passive or negative one. He cited Buddha's teaching, "conquer anger through non-anger" referring as a path of non-violence. Gandhi elaborated that this 'non-anger' is a positive attribute, embodying the highest virtues of love and compassion (Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi; 41:103).

Furthermore, in an interview with Prof. Mays in 1937, Gandhi said that "effects of Buddha's non-violent action persist and are likely to grow with age. And the more it is practiced, the more effectively and inexhaustible it becomes" (Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi 70:261).

CONCLUSION:

Gandhi had a great respect for the Buddha and his teachings. His philosophy of non-violence was well followed by Gandhi. The ideals of non-violence in both Buddhism and Hinduism resemble each other as *Nirvana* in Buddhism and *Nirvana* in Hinduism as claimed by Gandhi are the same state. Gandhi revered the Buddha and was deeply committed to follow his footsteps and the fundamental principle of his teaching in the way of achieving enlightenment which are reflected in his writings as well as his speeches.

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